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Governor's deal with builders irks senators

Association won't fight trust-land initiative, gets break on tax issue

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Some Republican state lawmakers on Monday blasted a "backroom deal" between Gov. Janet Napolitano and a Valley home-builders group that would exempt residential developers from sharing a portion of the costs of a major transportation initiative in exchange for a \$100,000 contribution to boost the signature-gathering campaign.

Under the agreement, the Home Builders Association of Central Arizona agreed to withdraw their opposition to a state trust-land initiative backed by Napolitano. In return, developer impact fees would no longer be part of the transportation initiative's approach to raising money.

The transit measure calls for raising the state sales tax by a penny to pay for freeway, bus, rail and other transportation projects.

Sen. Ron Gould, chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee, rebuked the home builders' group, saying it had caved in to the governor's pressure. He vowed to oppose the efforts of the Transportation and Infrastructure Moving Arizona's Economy, or TIME Coalition, the group of civic and business leaders behind the \$42.6 billion statewide transportation plan.

"The money men (home builders), they need to grow some spine, they need to get some intestinal fortitude, and they need to stand up to these guys and stand up to these guys and say, 'This is a bad plan and we're not giving a dime,'" Gould said. Republican Sens. Robert Blendu of Litchfield Park and Jack Harper of Surprise also questioned the deal.

Dennis Burke, Napolitano's chief of staff, said Friday the agreement was an important step forward for trust-land reform and for meeting the state's transportation needs. Representatives of the Home Builders Association said it would be fair for all Arizonans to pay the sales tax because most or all use the state's highways.

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